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NOTES ON THE WHITTEMORE HOMESTEAD PEMBROKE STREET PEMBROKE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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These notes are based on a brief inspection of the Whittemore Homestead on the morning of August 20, 2009. The purpose of the inspection was to ascertain the approximate dates of construction and subsequent alterations to the homestead, which has not been dated clearly in the *History of Pembroke* or other sources. Present at the inspection were Ayn Whytemare (Anne Whittemore), her sons Duncan Donovan and Aaron Whittemore Donovan, and James L. Garvin. The inspection was not exhaustive and did not include basement or attic. The following narrative could be augmented by closer study of the details of the house.



Summary: The Whittemore Homestead appears to date from circa 1800. Parts of the interior remain relatively unchanged, but certain rooms were modernized around 1850, and the southeast parlor appears to have been further remodeled at the end of the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that the house has been adapted by different generations of the Whittemore family, the dwelling retains a strong degree of architectural integrity and represents one of the most significant of the surviving historic buildings of Pembroke. It is an important document in the architectural history of the Merrimack Valley in New Hampshire.

Because of its apparent date of construction, the following assumptions may be made about the sequence of treatments by members of the Whittemore family. The *History of Pembroke* (1895) gives the following summary of the history of the house in reverse chronology (Site 56, page 400): “Fred C. Whittemore, Hon. Aaron Whittemore, Jr., Hon. Aaron Whittemore. Here Mr. Whittemore kept tavern several years after he built the house.” Because there were a series of Aaron Whittemores in Pembroke, beginning with the Rev. Aaron Whittemore (1713-1767), the first minister of the Congregational Church, the attribution of the construction of the house to “Hon. Aaron Whittemore” can be confusing.¹ Available information indicates that the house was constructed by the Hon. Aaron Whittemore (1775-1850). It appears that the house was remodeled, as described below, by the builder’s son, Hon. Aaron Whittemore (1808-1890) upon the builder’s death in 1850. The *History of Pembroke* is in error in indicating that the house was owned by “Fred C. Whittemore” in 1895. The actual owner at that date, as shown in the genealogical sources cited in the footnote, was Frederick Brewster Whittemore (1857-1902). Of Frederick B. Whittemore, Ayn Whytemare says, “having gone our west and married the widow Candace Chamberlain [of Kansas], Frederick and Candace died of TB in 1902 leaving their sons orphans. They were the last family to use the homestead as both residence and to farm.” It appears, as noted below, that Frederick B. Whittemore may have remodeled the southeast parlor, to the left of the front door, when he acquired ownership of the house after 1890.

Original appearance: The Whittemore Homestead is a large “double” house, having two chimneys and a central stairhall. It is one of a small number of such dwellings in Pembroke. The Historical and Cultural Resources Chapter of the current Pembroke Master Plan says of these houses,

These dwellings, the largest of the town’s surviving early houses, are to be found as rare examples in Suncook Village, along Pembroke Street, and scattered within the agricultural uplands. This small group of dwellings is typified by having two massive chimneys and a broad central stairhall. This floor plan can be traced back to the early 1700s in the New Hampshire seacoast, where such dwellings were called “double” houses.

Among the “double” houses that may be cited as examples of the type are the David Kimball tavern at 223 Pembroke Street, near the head of Broadway; the Aaron Whittemore homestead or tavern at 374 Pembroke Street, north of

¹ For detailed information on the Whittemore family, see Vol. II of N. F. Carter and T. L. Fowler, *History of Pembroke, N. H. 1730-1895* (Concord, N. H.: Republican Press Association, 1895; reprint ed., Allentown and Pembroke, N. H.: Allentown-Pembroke Bicentennial Committee, 1976), and Ayn Whytemare, “The Whittemore Family Tree” (typescript).

Pembroke Street Cemetery; the Cochran House on Buck Street at its intersection with Academy Road; the Richardson House at 441 Sixth Range Road, east of Cross Country Road and the Richardson Cemetery; and the Daniel Knox House at the intersection of Dudley Hill Road and Fifth Range Road.

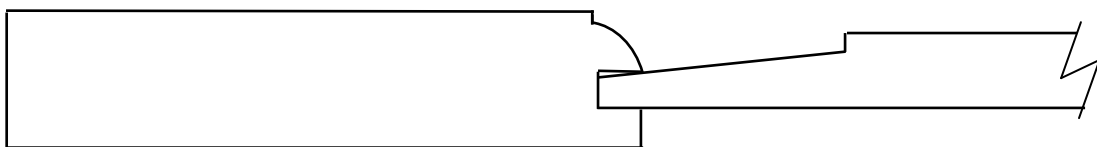
Some of these houses, including the Kimball tavern, have traditionally been ascribed to dates prior to the advent of the Federal period in the 1790s, but closer dating of purported earlier examples must await careful examination of these houses. On the other hand, the double house at 179 Main Street in Suncook Village, said to have been built by selectman and postmaster Stephen Bates after 1833, seems to show that this eighteenth-century house type might persist in Pembroke even after the Federal style was giving way to the Greek Revival style.

The Whittemore Homestead has a symmetrical five-bay façade facing Pembroke Street. As noted below, most features of the façade, including the central doorway and the window casings, have been remodeled, and the façade has been re-clapboarded. The side elevations of the house have two windows on each floor and two in each gable, ventilating the attic. In the center of each end elevation is a doorway that enters the space between the side of each chimney and the exterior wall. Elsewhere in the house, as is traditional with double houses, the areas between each chimney and the nearby exterior or stairhall walls are filled with closets or passages connecting front and rear rooms (or combinations of passages and closets). The rear elevation of the house is intersected by a modern, two-story wing, which provides kitchen facilities on the first story and sleeping areas above.

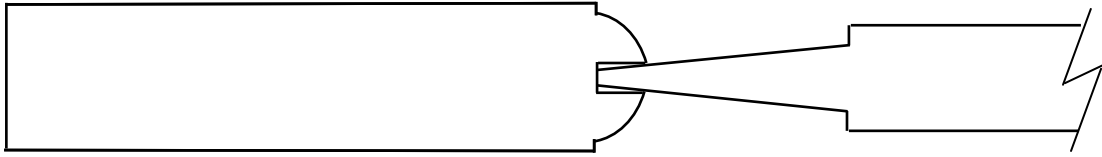
As originally built, the house apparently had a fireplace in each room. The dwelling is unusual in having two kitchens in the rear rooms behind each chimney. As the History of Pembroke notes (p. 400), “here Mr. [Aaron] Whittemore kept tavern several years after he built the house.” The family retains a diamond-shaped tavern sign bearing the initials “A + W”, the Masonic square and compass (over-painted), and the date “1813.”

The interior of the house reveals original detailing in many rooms. On the first story, the least altered room is the northeast parlor, to the right of the front doorway. This room may originally have served as the original parlor, or the room opposite (which has been remodeled) could originally have been equally or more elaborately detailed. The northeast parlor reveals the transitional nature of the interior joinery of the house as built. It combines raised panel doors and window shutters, which reflect the norm of the eighteenth century, with a well detailed mantelpiece that reveals the influence of the incoming Federal style of architecture, and very likely the influence of Asher Benjamin’s book, *The Country Builder’s Assistant* (1797, with later editions). The combination of conservative and advanced details suggests a date of around 1800.

The original doors of the house are raised-panel doors with two profiles, depending on their location in the house. The majority are single-faced doors with this cross section:



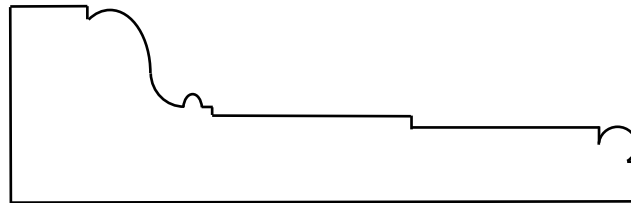
In at least one location, the door leading from the northeast parlor to the stairhall, a double-faced door was employed in order to present raised panels to viewers on both sides:



Other rooms on the first story, though altered somewhat as described below, often retain raised-panel doors that were retained in use, or re-hung, when architectural changes were carried out.

Sliding window shutters in the front windows of the northeast parlor also have the raised panel cross-section seen above (top). These shutters are supported by grooved rails that span the window openings at the level of the meeting rails of the sashes, allowing the top and bottom shutters to be adjusted independently.

The door and windows casings in the northeast parlor appear to be original, and are the most elaborate early casings seen in the house; those in the other front room, to the left of the front doorway, are later in date and reflect late nineteenth-century style (see below). The original casings in the northeast room have this profile:

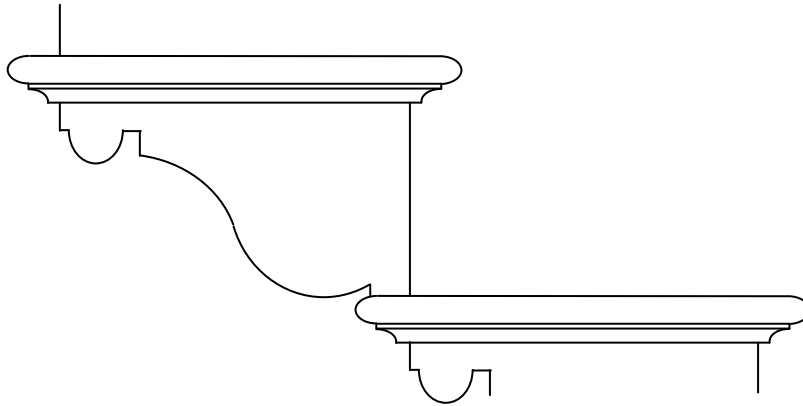


The mantelpiece in this room is likewise the most elaborate to survive in the house. It has pilasters on each side of the fireplace opening, and the centers of these pilasters are recessed or “sunk,” as described by Asher Benjamin in Plate 20 of his *Country Builder’s Assistant* (1797).

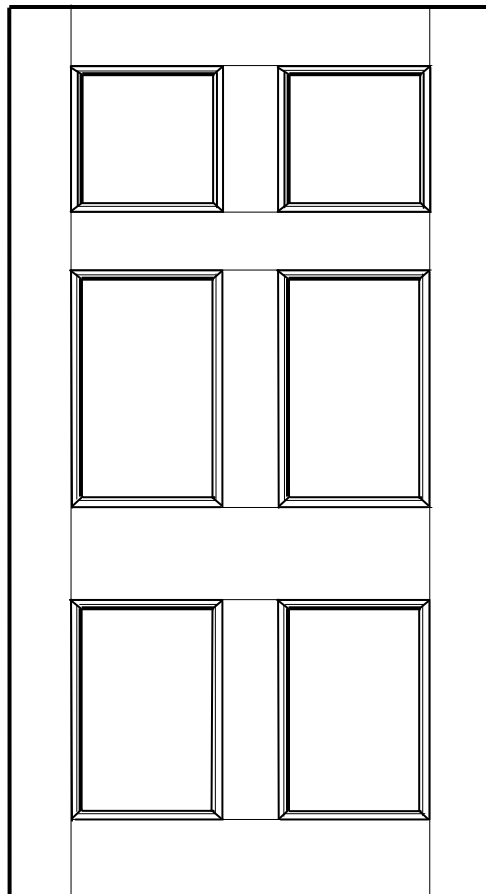
Other rooms in the house retain open fireplaces and joinery that appears to be original. These rooms include the chamber above the northeast parlor, the chamber above the southeast parlor, and the chamber above the northwest kitchen. All have mantelpieces, but each mantelpiece is unique in some way while probably drawing inspiration from one of the plates in *The Country Builder’s Assistant*. The chamber above the northeast parlor has an early Federal-style mantelpiece that suggests the one in the room below it, except that the pilasters are simple boards, rectangular in cross-section, without sunken panels. The front chamber opposite, above the southeast parlor, has a mantelpiece that appears to have been derived from Plate 19 in Benjamin’s book. The rear chamber above the northwest kitchen apparently derives from Plate 17.

The staircase rises along the right-hand wall of the entry. The balustrade is simple, with square balusters, and the handrail has an angular cap that suggests the unavailability of larger molding planes that might have produced a more classic handrail. The newel and angle posts at the bottom and top of the rising balustrade project far above the cap of the rail in an unsophisticated

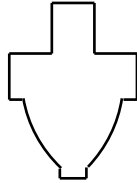
detail that perhaps derives from the local scarcity of double houses with single-flight staircases such as this. The stair brackets, however, were cut with considerable care, as shown below:



Later changes: Sometime around 1850, to judge from stylistic evidence, the exterior of the house was altered to express the Greek Revival style, and certain rooms of the interior were likewise remodeled in the then-current style. In the exterior, the original front doorway or frontispiece, of unknown design, was replaced by a recessed entrance. The recess is cased with flat boards having applied fillets at their inner and outer edges to suggest sunken panels. At the upper corners, where the side casings and top casing intersect, are projecting square corner blocks. At the center of the top casing is a rectangular block. To the viewer of 1850, this new entrance would have been immediately recognizable as a modern doorway. Within the recessed opening, the front door is surrounded by long sidelights that extend nearly to the floor, and by a transom sash. The door itself is a Federal-style door with six panels, as shown below, and may represent the reused original front door of the house.



The muntin profile of the sidelights and transom of the new entry appears to match that of the six-over-six window sashes that are seen throughout most of the house. This suggests that all of the sashes were replaced during the modernization of the house, although the windows on the main floors should be compared with the sashes in the attic, which may be original and could offer a better understanding of the date of the sashes used below. The muntin profile of most sashes on the first and second stories is shown below.



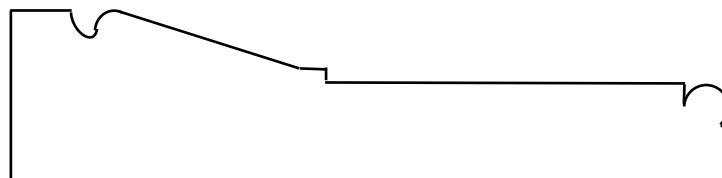
This profile is not distinctly Grecian in style, but it appears to have been selected in conjunction with the other mid-nineteenth-century changes described below.

The other significant exterior alteration that was carried out in the mid-century was the replacement of the window casings. On the first story, the new casings were provided with “ears” or crossets at their upper corners. On both the first and second stories, new backband moldings, of an extremely flat Grecian profile, were applied to the casings. Most of these backbands were replaced when the house was re-clapboarded, but originals survive on the north side of the house.

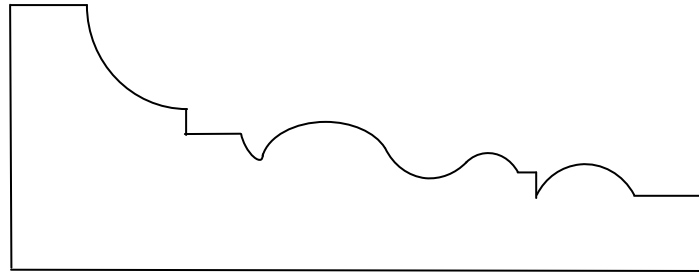
On the interior, modern joinery was applied in the two rear kitchens. For some reason, the small rear bedchamber in the southwest corner of the house was also modernized. An original fireplace was apparently sealed and a stove substituted to warm the room; a small wooden shelf was attached to the wall above the stove in a fashion that was common when stoves replaced fireplaces.

The new mantelpieces that were installed in both of the rear kitchens are severely plain in style, thereby reflecting the preferred appearance of Greek Revival chimneypieces. In both kitchens, the fireplaces were enframed with surrounds that set the fireplaces off alone, not embracing the adjacent ovens. The oven doors were surrounded with plaster and thereby made to blend in appearance with the adjacent walls. Both ovens were fitted with cast iron doors and dampers bearing the name of “Cutler and Robinson, Boston.” It should be possible to date these doors, at least approximately, by checking the years of operation of this firm through the Boston City Directories. A quick search shows Elisha P. Cutler and E. E. Robinson as commission merchants in the 1840 directory; and as “Stoves” (dealers and/or manufacturers) in the 1849 directory. Cutler and Robinson do not seem to be listed in the 1853 *Boston Almanac*, which served as a business directory.

New door and window casings were installed in these kitchens. The casings have this profile, which would have been recognizably Grecian and modern in the mid-nineteenth century:



Following the remodeling of circa 1850, the Whittemore Homestead assumed the general appearance that it retains to this day: that of a large house that was built in a conservative architectural style circa 1800 and was modernized circa 1850. Within the house, however, one room appears to have undergone a further remodeling at the end of the nineteenth century. The southeast parlor, to the left of the front door, has more elaborate door and window casings than those seen elsewhere in the house, and these are not Grecian in character. Although not studied carefully, the door and window casings in this parlor have approximately this profile:



These casings are characteristic of the later nineteenth century. The doors in this room are also of a four-panel pattern that reflects a late nineteenth century type. Taken together, these features suggest the touch of the third generation of Whittemores to occupy the house.